



# DHS Matters!

Michigan Department of Human Services • Lansing, Michigan • September 23, 2008  
Produced by DHS Office of Communications, Suite 1510, Grand Tower, Lansing  
Submit stories by e-mail to [DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov](mailto:DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov)

## Traverse City DDS part of local day of caring

**John DeSpelder**  
Area Administrator  
Northern Service Area  
Disability Determination Service  
[John.Despelder@ssa.gov](mailto:John.Despelder@ssa.gov)

Employees from the Traverse City Disability Determination Service office participated in the United Way of Northwest Michigan's annual Day of Caring on Sept. 11. Hundreds of local volunteers attended a kickoff breakfast held at the city opera house in downtown Traverse City. At the breakfast the United Way board of directors and community leaders expressed their appreciation for the work that the volunteers were about to do. A moment of silence was observed in memory of those who were lost on Sept. 11, 2001.

The DDS team assignment was to do trail maintenance on the Leelanau Trail, part of the Traverse Area Recreational Trail (TART) system. The team of 14 volunteers was assigned to cut back trees and brush along the trail, and to go as far as possible toward the trailhead at Cherry Bend road. Along the way the team members received lots of thanks from trail users. It's clear that the trail system is used by all generations and members of the community. This was the fourth consecutive year DDS staff have done trail maintenance on the United Way Day of Caring.

The Traverse City DDS has a special relationship with the TART trails. Dr. Jim Mudgett was a DDS review physician who passed away a few years ago. Dr. Mudgett was an enthusiastic supporter of the trails, a community leader and advocate of health and wellness. Each year TART trails awards the Jim Mudgett Award, which was created to honor Dr. Mudgett's memory and to pay tribute to individuals who have shown leadership and passion for our local trails. DDS staff also created and maintains the Jim Mudgett Memorial Garden at Clinch Park in Traverse City.



**Clearing the trails from left: Julie Fernandez (retired DDS examiner); Missy Luyk, trails program specialist; and Traverse City DDS employees Mike O'Connor, Sue Dixon, John DeSpelder, Joan Richardson, Tom Sevensma, Kyle Goulding, Gary MacAulay, Cyndi Gaudette, Terri Rytkenon, Jan Merriman, Larry Schillinger, Stephanie McPherson and Bill Brief.**

*Click to read...*

**Local office stories.....2-4**

**Middle ground.....4**



**2008 campaign Sept. 15-Oct. 17**

**[www.misecc.org](http://www.misecc.org)**

## Barry CASA, foster & adoptive group join hands for summer fun

From Jan Look, Volunteer Supervisor

### Court-Appointed Special Advocate of Barry County

Most children would balk at the idea of going to school in the summer, washing dishes by hand with no running water, ironing with an antique flat iron, or other house chores reminiscent of how things were done 100 years ago. But that's exactly what 27 Barry County foster and adopted children did July 24 at Historic Charlton Park and Village in Hastings.

Accompanied by their foster and adoptive families and CASA volunteers (court-appointed special advocates), the children enthusiastically dipped candles and performed kitchen chores. As part of kitchen duties, children helped prepare some of their lunch by chopping vegetables for their soup, and churning butter that they later ate with cornbread. The highlight of the morning was to take part in lessons at the one-room Lee Schoolhouse. After they had learned their lessons, the families were treated to a picnic lunch provided by Barry-Eaton CASA for Kids, Inc. DHS staff grilled and served hot dogs and other picnic fare.

Barry County foster family recruiter, **Juls Mueller-Hayes**, and Jan Look of CASA collaborated to organize respite for foster and adoptive families in Barry County. CASA volunteers, who are often assigned to represent the voices of foster children in court and to be the "eyes and ears" of the judge, are well suited for this partnership with local foster families. Several CASAs participated with the morning activities alongside the families to help the children enjoy the day.

"CASA is thrilled that so many of our volunteers are able to help with this summer picnic and outing to the park. We've all learned a bit more about Barry County history," said Jan Look.



From left: **Julie Wiles** from Barry-Eaton DHS, CASA volunteers **Colette Purucker**, **Laura Brandt**, **Mary Hentschel**, **Cindy Feenstra** and CASA supervisor **Jan Look** pose for the camera once the picnic lunch had been served to the foster and adoptive children and their families. **Keith Behm**, DHS volunteer supervisor, and volunteer **Trish Murphy** were not available for the photo, but also helped serve.



**Camaraderie Committee members (left to right): Tanya Doaty, Lacy Johnson, Debra Hurt, Elizabeth Wendt, Darnise Kennedy, and (front) Barbara Gabriel** welcome colleagues to the event.

## Luncheon celebrates team accomplishments in Detroit

By **Gisgie Davila Gendreau**

DHS Office of Communications, Lansing

[GendreauG@michigan.gov](mailto:GendreauG@michigan.gov)

DETROIT – It may have seemed like they were just munching on salads, but Wayne County's Forest Ellery District office employees were busy doing much more: They were building up their team and helping improve morale.

"I just love to see them relax and smile," said **Barbara Gabriel**, an eligibility specialist who also chairs the office's Camaraderie Committee. "If you can make somebody smile, it's worth it."

And smile they did. More than 60 staff members enjoyed the committee's efforts at the Sept. 10 event. "Oohs" and "aahs" followed the long line leading to the table full of salad fixings.

"We really had two goals for this group," district manager **Margie Young** said. "First, improving morale; and, second, building teamwork."

Young said that staff members make their work their priority, but wanted to take some time to recognize their colleague's efforts as they meet the needs of about 2,100 clients a month.

After lunch, representatives from the Family-to-Family of Southeastern Village and Goodwill Industries made presentations about the services they offer. Learning about community resources helps front-line staff better serve their clients, Young said.

What's next? A potato bar with toppings and an upcoming fund-raiser to provide Thanksgiving baskets to community members in need.

■ The author is the new marketing-public relations director at DHS. Her name is pronounced Geese-G jhen-draw.



## Van Buren DHS employees make a difference

From Sue McCauley  
Van Buren DHS, Hartford  
[MccauleyW2@michigan.gov](mailto:MccauleyW2@michigan.gov)

Everyone begs to have casual days; all managers know that. To meet their need the employees at Van Buren DHS decided to try something a bit different. They proposed a free casual day once a week and in return, staff and managers would pay for a casual day the following week. It wasn't self-indulgence that provoked the idea; it was two life-changing events that tragically effected millions of people – Sept. 11 and the 2004 Christmas day tsunami. There was an outpouring of donations from staff at that time to help support victims of those devastating events. Shortly thereafter, "Casual for a Cause" evolved in Van Buren County.



**Van Buren DHS staff have contributed \$7,000 to various causes the past three years during casual day events.**

Employees submitted a vote for a cause of their choice along with a \$5 donation every other week if they chose to dress casually. There was no pressure for employees to participate. However, the response was outstanding. Once we collected \$1,000 the cause with the most votes received the donation. Since fall 2005 Van Buren employees have donated \$7,000. Recipients of the money have been Habitat for Humanity, Make-A-Wish Foundation, Juvenile Diabetes Research, phone cards for soldiers, Paws for a Cause, and The Van Buren Summer Youth Camp Project (twice). Our staff recently chose to support the in-house emergency food pantry located at the Van Buren DHS local office.

Always being mindful of the Department of Human Services' mission and values, the employees in Van Buren strive to stay committed and make a difference in the lives of others as well as the families they serve. Their dedication and giving spirit is commendable.

## Cheboygan chalk art day funds back-to-school needs

From Meriann Thomsen, FIM  
Cheboygan County DHS  
[ThomsenM@michigan.gov](mailto:ThomsenM@michigan.gov)

Cheboygan County DHS sponsored a sidewalk art competition on Aug. 13 to raise money and fill backpacks with school supplies for needy DHS children. Participants paid an entry fee to participate and were given a concrete square in the Cheboygan DHS parking lot.

We provided the chalk and



**"Blue's Clues" by Mike Fobar and Pam Snow.**

participants brought out their artistic talents in a drawing of their choice. Contestants represented these staff sections:



**RSS Christen Sachwell and Lydia Schenk (above from left & front to back) team up with ES Katy Lloyd and Gretchen Charboneau to create their masterpiece.**

registration (RSS), JET-FIS-ES, children's services, quality control, management and the county director. There was a time limit to complete the masterpieces and voting took place to decide the favorite. To cast a vote, a person had to give a voluntary contribution of any amount. All entry fees and voting revenue were tallied and given to the Backpack Project. The day's total was \$180.

A big thanks to all of the Cheboygan DHS staff that participated and voted. Not only was it fun and chance to go back to our childhood chalk drawing days, but needy DHS kids can go back to school with new backpacks and plenty of cool school supplies.

## Middle ground – past, present and future

By Elizabeth Putney

Published by Shipherd's Record, the alumni magazine of Olivet College, and used with permission

In 2006, nine Olivet College psychology majors teamed up with the Barry-Eaton County DHS foster care system to create a program for the older foster students. Their plan was to start something that would educate and help students aging out of foster care. What was founded was Middle Ground. Cynthia Noyes, associate professor of sociology and anthropology, remembers how it all started.

"In the fall of 2006 I began attending community partnership meetings at the Barry-Eaton County DHS," she said. "I met **Julie Wiles** (Barry-Eaton Family to Family supervisor) there. She introduced me to a program called Family to Family which focuses on trying to help families in distress remain intact. Part of the goal of the program is to help children who enter the foster care system stay in school and complete their education.

"One of the issues Julie articulated was the need for children aging out of the foster system to have mentors to help them as they leave. I saw this as a wonderful opportunity for my students and, fortunately, a number of them agreed."

Barry-Eaton District Volunteer Services

Coordinator **Keith Behm** added: "A main issue that has been present in foster care is, 'How do we prepare youth to be productively independent and get them information to services that help reach that goal?' That is where the Olivet College students come in."

Olivet students decided to meet with the teens the first Thursday of every month, a time when all of the foster parents get together to work on their training. They focused on getting to know the students they would be helping and finding out how to work with them on how to be successful after high school.



From left: Jennifer Martin, Cynthia Noyes, Elizabeth Putney and Tham Doan, Olivet College participants in Middle Ground with Barry-Eaton DHS.



**Berrien County DHS staff celebrated the 90th birthday of volunteer Leila Williams (center front) on Aug. 7. Berrien staff provided a potluck and a gift of money to her as a thank you for everything she has done for the agency. Leila has volunteered in the adult services unit in Berrien County since 2003. From 1975-84, Williams worked for Berrien and Van Buren counties in administrative support and as a cash assistance worker. Because of her warm-hearted ways, she has captured the hearts of many of the children services staff, supervisors and administrative support staff. She continues to give to the community, even in her retirement years and is truly a very special person.**

**– from Lee R. Stults**

As the Middle Ground students began to understand the foster students' needs, the programs and information they provided became more significant. Middle Ground has increased in size significantly over the past few semesters. The group also continues to find new ways to connect with foster youths.

Noyes added that with proper funding, the organization could greatly improve its programs and activities. "We are currently looking into writing a grant to get funding that would allow us to engage the youth we're working with in some cultural exploration," she said.

Behm and Wiles look forward to building a stronger connection between the Barry-Eaton County DHS foster care program and Middle Ground. "The unique relationship between Olivet College and DHS has led to internships for Olivet students, as well as many other great things," said Behm.

**DHS Matters!** is a product of Michigan's Department of Human Services  
Ismael Ahmed, Director • Edward Woods III, Director, Office of Communications  
Larry VanDeSande, Editor • Submit stories by e-mail to: [DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov](mailto:DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov)